

## **A History of Hoover**

Written by Vadie Honea, founder of the Hoover Historical Society

Hoover's history is fascinating; beginning with the land, lakes, river, creeks and its people, a tapestry is woven. Spreading across parts of Jefferson County and northern Shelby County, Hoover sprawls down the slope of Shades Mountain with the Cahaba River snaking its way across the southern section.

For thousands of years before white people settled here, Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws and Chickasaws hunted and camped along the water sites leaving their names and arrowheads as part of this tapestry. The Federal Government acquired the land in what is now known as Jefferson County in the Creek Session of 1814. When the Indian tribes were forced westward, settlers from southeastern coastal states moved onto the land. The path of Chapel Road was the route of the old state coach road previously used by the Indians when crossing from Talladega to Tuscaloosa.

Among these early settlers were the Pattons, Actons, Baileys, Hales, Tylers and others establishing homes on land purchased from the Federal Government. These families and their many descendants wove together a pattern as used by early pioneers. They started sawmills, built houses, churches and schools, living off the farms and helping each other.

The land in Hoover is located above a large coal bed called the Cahaba Coal Fields. The first attempt at mining this coal was in 1853. During the Civil War the increased need of the Confederate Government for coal accelerated the development of mines in Jefferson County and the Acton Mines, south of Riverchase.

Development of the Acton Basin by Henry DeBardeleben went into operation under the name of Alabama Fuel & Iron Company around 1906. It contained an area of nearly 42 sq. miles. The amount of coal in the basin less than 3,600 feet deep was 143,000,000 tons net. A company owned railroad connecting the mining villages was constructed to transport coal and supplies. This provided significant work for the local people. John Bailey of the Patton Chapel area was supervisor of construction and maintenance of the Acton Mines.

Completion of the L&N Railroad in 1869 at Brocks Gap in the western section of present Hoover extended the marketing of coal. Mining continued until 1945 when T.C.I. sold this rich mineral land to the Chace Brothers. The family mined for eighteen years and sold the land in 1968 to Harbert Construction Company for the development of Riverchase. Part of Hoover's history rests under the land in these veins.

As population increased in the Bluff Park, Patton Chapel and Rocky Ridge areas, houses for worship and schooling were needed. In 1854, a one-room log cabin was built for Presbyterian worship and school in Rocky Ridge; in 1866 Robert Patton donated land for a church used by Methodist worship and a school with adjoining cemetery in Patton Chapel area. In 1889 worship for Methodist and Baptist in the Bluff Park area was held in a barn on the property of Daniel P. Hale. Nine years later a one-room building was constructed on property donated by Nathan Jordan Dison where joint worship and schooling of both faith continued until separate churches were built.

Each of these communities continued to expand and more church and school facilities added. The civic-minded citizens became involved in community activities through membership in many clubs. In 1938 the Home Demonstration Club was organized in the Patton Chapel area which was being identified as Green Valley. In Bluff Park, the Shades Cliff Civic Club was organized in 1939 and was responsible for creating and staffing the Bluff Park Volunteer Fire Department. Rocky Ridge Fire Protection District was also established and would answer calls in the Patton chapel area.

Mr. William H. Hoover organized the Employers Mutual Insurance of Alabama in 1921 with offices in Birmingham. In 1944 he purchased 160 acres of land along a narrow dirt logging road called Tyler Road in the Bluff Park area. He erected a two-room log cabin from trees cut off his property. In 1947 their beautiful home was completed and the family moved in. When the Alabama Highway Department in 1953 began widening Highway 31 from the crest of Shades Mountain in Vestavia to the Cahaba River, Mr. Hoover, a man with vision, began buying land on Highway 31 south of Vestavia. He organized the South Jefferson Company as a holding company of Employers Mutual Insurance of Alabama to handle real estate transactions.

Mr. Hoover moved his company, then known as Employers Insurance of Alabama, Inc., to Highway 31 and began purchasing land for the construction of dwellings for his employees. This area was identified as the Hoover Community. In 1959 residential growth was encouraged by the first Parade of Homes sponsored by the Birmingham Association of Home Builders with a house at 1821 Valgreen Lane raffled off to purchasers of tickets selling for one dollar. That year he gave land for the development of the Green Valley Country Club and a nine-hole golf course. The Hoover Volunteer Fire Department was formed and incorporated in May 1962, its first fire truck was purchased from the City of Birmingham. Ralph Sheppard was appointed to serve as fire chief. The Hoover Civic Club, formed in 1965, printed a telephone directory of this community listing family members with ages.

The need to incorporate the community was soon recognized to protect its boundaries. In December 1964 an attempt was made to incorporate the residential developments of Hoover and Green Valley as the town of Hoover. Area residents chose not to incorporate. Residents of the Hoover area decided to attempt another incorporation vote on April 28, 1967. This time the petitioning area was smaller, consisting of four blocks long and one block wide, mostly of the Hoover Community citizens, and was accepted. The population of the new town was four hundred and six people. An election for a one-year term was soon held for officials. Don Watts was voted to become mayor, along with council members O.E. Braddock, Edward N. Ernst, John W. Hodnett, Dwight M. Roper, and Howard W. Rasco. Jack Harrison was hired as the town's first attorney.

In May of 1968 an election was held that incorporated an adjacent area called Green Valley with Payton Elliott as mayor. A flaw in the voters registration of this election was discovered by the Hoover City attorney and a suit resulted. It was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court and the State of Alabama nullified the incorporation. A bill was passed in the legislature that stated no two cities in Jefferson County could be incorporated within three miles of each other. Because of this Green Valley could not attempt to reincorporate.

In 1963 when membership increased at Green Valley Country Club, the second nine holes were completed and the clubhouse with swimming pool added in 1964. Chace Lake Country Club opened its first nine holes for play in 1963.

The second Hoover election in 1968 was for a four-year term. Edward Ernest was elected Mayor. A Zoning Committee was appointed and Gerald R. Smith was appointed inspector for the Department of Inspection Services. Because of ill health, Mr. Earnest was forced to resign. In December 1969, O.E. Braddock moved from the council to serve as mayor. At this time John Harbert, C.E.O. of Harbert International began buying land along Highway 31 and Valleydale Road. He purchased land owned by the Chace brothers in Acton where he later developed the Riverchase subdivision. Braddock made contact with John Harbert for the annexation of Riverchase but this did not materialize. Annexations of other surrounding residential areas began in 1969. Two years later the first city hall was constructed on Highway 31 on land donated by Mr. Hoover with a jail on the first floor.

Hoover was recognized as a place to enjoy a high quality of life and good opportunity for business development with excellent fire and police protection. The Hoover Mall opened in 1972 with twenty-one stores. Other businesses on Lorna Road opened and were annexed. "Motor Mile" is the name given to the stretch of Highway 31 occupied by automobile dealers. Beginning on 1973 Don Drennen Buick, Ivan Leonard Chevrolet and Hoover Toyota opened here. May other dealerships followed: McFarlane Cadillac in 1974 and Tameron and Crown Pontiac in 1980.

Mayor Braddock died unexpectedly in 1975; John Hodnett filled his unexpired term. The Hoover Beautification Board was created in 1977 to improve the aesthetic appeal of the city. The Hoover Chamber of Commerce was established in 1978 with Mike Carroll as Executive Vice President and Jean McCurdy as secretary. The Hoover Belles was founded and organized by Fay Anderson in 1979 to serve as official hostesses for the city. By this time Harbert's three-thousand-acre Riverchase was developed with a country club. He was planning to incorporate as a city. Hodnett extended another invitation to annex, and after much discussion Riverchase was annexed on September 8, 1980. The tapestry of Hoover was extending with threads left by many people for others to weave into the pattern.

Another election was held in 1980 and Frank Skinner became Mayor. Because of the extensive growth of the city, additional services were needed and provided. A new three-story municipal complex was constructed on Municipal Drive. In 1982 Mary Lou Allen assembled a group to form the Friends of the Hoover Public Library. This group, with the support of Mayor Skinner, formed the Hoover Public Library. Linda Andrews was hired as director and the library opened October 2, 1983, where it immediately received the support of the community. The Hoover Public Library has continued to enhance its quality and services with various cultural events and special entertainment, and facilities were expanded in 2001 to accommodate this growth.

The Riverchase Galleria opened in 1986 with the Wynfrey Hotel, various restaurants, and over two hundred specialty stores.

Hoover had four public elementary schools: Rocky Ridge, Green Valley, Bluff Park, and Shades Mountain; Gwinn Middle School; and W.A. Berry High School. There were two private schools: Shades Mountain Independent Christian and Brakeworth Elementary School. These were developed under the Jefferson County Board of Education. In 1988 an Education Committee was appointed to consider whether the citizens should work for the creation of an independent city school district for Hoover. The recommendation was favorable and a referendum was drawn up and presented to the public, where it was rejected by a small margin. After reviewing all results, the Mayor and Council drew up a resolution establishing the school system. This was a very wise decision and has become one of the greatest assets to the city. Hoover City Schools have received international recognition and the system has grown to include nine elementary schools, four middle schools, and two high schools.

By 1989 the boundaries of the city had extended in a westerly direction to include Bluff Park, the Trace Crossings industrial complex, the Regions Park Stadium and other residential areas along South Shades Crest Road. Boundaries in the easterly direction were extended to include Altadena Woods, Southlake subdivision, and other small residential communities. By 1992 the boundaries had extended in the easterly direction to include the commercial and residential areas of Inverness and Greystone. Each of these communities had established country clubs, garden clubs and other enhancements to benefit the city and its residents.

The Hoover Historical Society was organized in 1989 and published the "History of Hoover and Its People" in 1992 to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the City's incorporation. When the new Bluff Park Elementary School was completed, the old school built in 1928 was preserved for use of the Hoover Community School. The library space was allocated for the office of the Historical Society where their collection and library is housed. In 1996 the Reverend Dr. Alvin Macon Stinson, Jr. family donated a log house to the Society. This house was moved and restored to the school grounds of Bluff Park Elementary to be used for educational and civic functions.

In 1995 the Eddie Aldridge family decided to leave their thirty-acre property on Lorna Road for a smaller place. They presented an offer to the city to acquire the property to be developed as public botanical gardens with hydrangea and other flowers from around the world. The home and gardens were to be preserved for use for private and public functions. A board was appointed to develop and manage the gardens, and Aldridge Gardens was opened to the public in 2002.

During February 1999, Mayor Frank Skinner resigned. Brian L. Skelton, then Council President, moved up to be Mayor until a new election was held. William M. Billingsly was appointed to be President of the Council. A new election, held August 2000, voted in Barbara McCollum as Mayor with Council members Kyle Forstman, Jody Patterson, Donna Mazur, Jack Wright, and Bob Austin. Steve Griffin was appointed city attorney to replace Roger Bates, who had served since Jack Harrison retired in April 1998. Virginia Williams was hired as Hoover's Director of Development.

Hoover's mercantile business has continued to increase. Frank Lopez, Director of Revenue, reported that 8,000 licenses were issued in 2000. Due to traffic congestion on Highway 31 and rapid development along the Highway 150 corridor, a flyover exit was constructed to allow direct access from I-459 to Galleria Drive and Hwy 150. The road was opened to traffic in November 2002. Areas within the city are being developed in all directions. Hoover purchased 250 acres of land along Chapel Road from USX for the creation of Moss Rock Preserve. Creeks that run through the Preserve flow into the Cahaba River. Plans are under development to provide public use of the Preserve with minimum disruption to nature.

The 2000 Census reports Hoover's population at 64,000 citizens. Hoover is represented by many different cultures and backgrounds, and has a large Hispanic population. The city has grown to include many medical and recreational facilities, nursing homes, hotels and banks. There are a large number of community organizations devoted to cultural and community development. Many churches of varied denominations are located in the city.

The City of Hoover has seen phenomenal growth and changes since its recent beginnings. City services have grown to include over 600 employees, some who have been with the City since its early years. 2002 brought the retirement of Gerald R. Smith, Building Inspector since 1968, and Chief Artie Childs, who served the Fire Department for over 30 years. The tapestry continues to expand with threads of many colors.